

GREAT BRITAIN.

REPORT OF THE COMMISSIONERS OF PRISONS.

The report of the Commissioners of Prisons for the year ending March 31st, 1889, shows the number of prisoners received during the year to have been 153,963 under sentence of the ordinary courts, 1222 soldiers and sailors sentenced by courts martial, and 8664 debtors, or imprisoned on civil process, making a total of 163,849. This shows an increase of nearly 7000 upon the numbers of the preceding year, and has occurred chiefly in prisoners under the sentence of the ordinary courts. The average daily number in prison was 15,255, of whom 12,673 were males and 2582 females.

There were 349 cases of insanity during the year, of which 210 were removed to asylums; 93 are stated to have been found insane upon reception, and 59 to have originated in prison. Of the other cases, it is said that "it is highly probable that although insanity was not immediately recognized, yet that it really existed on reception in a majority, if not the whole of them." Dr. Gover remarks: "The local prisons of England and Wales are at present used to some extent as hospitals for the treatment of mental and bodily disease, but as they are not intended for or adapted to that purpose, it is advisable that the practice in vogue should be discontinued as far as possible." We can hardly suppose that he means that convicted prisoners laboring under bodily disease should be exempted from undergoing their punishment of imprisonment on that account; and, as regards mental disease, the fact of 256 cases having occurred in which no such state was detected by the prison medical officer on admission justifies an opinion that the abnormal mental condition could scarcely have been ascertained before the prisoner was sentenced. Under such circumstances, it is difficult to understand how the prisoners could have been dealt with more satisfactorily in the interests of the public and for their own benefit—*The Lancet.*

The medical report of St. Luke's Hospital, Surrey, records a case of special interest, the wife of an officer in the army, who recovered after a residence of fourteen years. She left the hospital eight months since, and we have every reason to believe she continues well. There is some encouragement to persevere with treatment beyond the ordinary term of twelve months, in the fact that seven of the recoveries took place in the second year of residence.

It is also noted that the recent Whitechapel tragedies had a very determining character upon the nature of the delusions both in the men and women admitted from the East End of London. As a rule the delusions were of a temporary nature, and soon subsided—Dr. Shaw, in asylum report; Bansted, Middlesex.

Concerning the proposed new lunatic hospital in London, Dr. Howden remarks:—

Proposals have been made lately in the London County Council to establish hospitals for the treatment of cases of insanity, where the highest medical knowledge and skill will be brought to bear on the study and treatment of insanity. If this project be carried out, it will no doubt be an advantage to the Medical Schools by affording extended means for the study of mental diseases, but that it will be a benefit to the patients is, I think, more than doubtful, as I do not consider that any asylum can efficiently fulfil its curative functions unless it has plenty of land around it to afford scope for the occupation and exercise of the patients.

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